

# Tom M. 2

Mon, 10/12 5:38PM 1:14:44

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

rod, tom, fishing, tip, wrap, fish, blank, bozeman, fly, spline, work, people, bamboo, shop, winston, building, fly fishing, pretty, handle, build

## SPEAKERS

Joel, Dave S, Matt



Joel 00:01

In the world of graphite, our rods are slower than most because of that progressive action. And so I think in that world, they're very different. But I think you know, bamboo has more of an organic feel to it. And I think it's hard not to fit. It's hard to fish bamboo and not feel kind of a connection to the history of fly fishing. You know, I grew up reading about chalk streams in England and you know, all this kind of history to it. That was



Dave S 00:24

Joel doubt describing one of the benefits of their Tom Morgan rods. This is Episode 161 of the wet fly swing fly fishing show. Welcome to the wet fly swing fly fishing show where you discover tips, tricks and tools from the leading names in fly fishing today. We'll help you on your fly fishing journey with classic stories covering steelhead fishing, fly tying and much more. Hey how's it going today? Thanks for stopping by the fly fishing show. Please subscribe to the show and share it with one other person. If you get a moment today that would be amazing. And I want to thank you in advance. The owners of Tom Morgan RodSmiths are hidden they to share the Tom Morgan story and talk rod building. Joel doubt and Matt barber share some tips on building a great rod. We hear about how you can stop by their shop for some tips and discuss where they might be going next with trout spey. This one's a good one and it's been a little time coming for sure so excited to share this episode. Before we get started I wanted to take a moment to thank our sponsors. So fly gear headed by 17 year old James Carlin of the US youth fly fishing team

has a buttery soft quick drying apparel line that I've been loving head over to wet fly swing com slash so fly and support James and the podcast the fly fishing and tying journal has an exceptional fall edition that's out right now. Head over to wet fly swing comm slash f TJ to support the great work Craig and the gang have created just for you. So again that's wet fly swing com slash f TJ and wet fly swing.com slash s o fly for so fly. be great if you can do that that would help help us assure we keep pumping out plenty of content. Without further ado, here is Matt and Joel from Tom Morgan rod Smith's dot com. How's it going guys?



02:26

Right How you doing? Good. Well, thanks.



Dave S 02:28

It's it's great to have you on here. We your name the Tom Morgan name I you know, I think I've heard about it obviously I think maybe not everybody is learned about so we're gonna dig into a little bit the background there and Tom Morgan and how it all came to be and how it's known as one of the one of the great, you know, fly rod companies out there. But maybe before we get started Can you guys just talk each kind of briefly about how you got into fly fishing?



Matt 02:53

Sure. This is Matt. I started as a young kid I grew up back on the east coast and my my great grandfather had a place up in the Berkshires of Massachusetts and I started throwing poppers for large mouth bass at a really young age with an old beater fiberglass rod and obviously if you catch a large enough bass on a popper, you're pretty much done from there. It's awesome.



Joel 03:16

Yeah, somewhere I grew up less than Denver on a little pond kind of in what is now sort of suburban Denver. Just fishing for bluegills and bass and got my first fly rod I when I was about five and kind of hiked around the foothills of Denver fishin as a kid. We got pretty pretty addicted to it. My grandpa was a fisherman. My parents were not so my dad would just drive into streams and take a nap in the car while I fished but was lucky to have some early mentors and my grandfather that kind of got me into it and kept me going. That's cool.



Dave S 03:46

Yeah, the stories are awesome. you know it's some guys to get started as a young you like you guys, some start older. One of the interesting things I can't remember who was talking about talking to but we were talking about tenkara and it's, it was interesting, because Oh, I know who was it was George Daniel, who I had on a while back and I was really listening to that episode I have with them. And he mentioned that he thought tenkara was a great way, you know, to get his kids into fly fishing. And I just curious, what's your guys's take on the tenkara? And obviously, I know I don't think you guys make tenkara rods. But do you guys have a perspective on that?



Matt 04:19

Yeah, you know, I haven't personally fished a lot of tenkara but I do have a six year old and starting young. I mean, I essentially tighten down the drag give them as much line as I think he can't get in trouble with and he pretty much fishing it like a tenkara rod so I for sure that simplifying it. You know, there's a lot of appeal to that.



Joel 04:42

Yeah, it's funny. I think I grew up fishing a 13 foot bamboo pole with just a length of string tied to the end of it for bluegills. It's funny, we had some conversations with Tom about it. And I think Tom was maybe not the biggest fan of tenkara You know, we're such deep traditionalist because we learned from Tom and his wife Gerry The people here that make rods, I think, you know, we kind of think of it as anathema. But I think that's right. I think from a beginning standpoint, the less you have to manage from the line reel set standpoint, the easier it is to kind of focus on fishing the fly and actually, you know, setting the hook and figure out where trout live and focusing your efforts there. So I think it's actually really useful in that regard. For sure. Yeah.



Dave S 05:19

Yeah. I think I can't remember you guys. I think you did mention some similarities between you know, your company and Patagonia on some of those and Patagonia actually had they had a lineup tenkara for a while. So that's kind of interesting. I haven't actually dug into the tenkara yet either. I think I will eventually because I think it'd be fun to check it out. But you know, the steelhead thing is something that obviously is a big focus, you know, on this podcast. Now, you guys haven't got into the steelhead. I think he is your heaviest rod you have is a seven week now.



Joel 05:49

Yeah, seven weights new. And so I think, you know, we get approached by people from from time to time about salt water and, and steelhead and spey fishing. And I think the one thing that we kind of learned from Tom is you pick what you do, and you just focus on really trying to do that as well as you possibly can. And so, you know, for Tom and from his lineage, he was a fishing guide in Montana, you know, and so our rods really are based on his experience fishing with clients, what they had a hard time doing was putting flies on a dinner plate to visible rising fish. And so our action really everything we do is based on trout fishing in Montana, you know, and I think that it's pretty easy if you're a big company to try to make, you know, a solution for everything that's out there, that we that are within our own lines and and try to focus on making the very best trout rods we can and and not keep our focus or let our focus broaden too much past that. Yeah, that



Dave S 06:39

makes sense. So it What's that seven? Wait like is that they mean, because you can use? I mean, I guess that's more of a set for heavier streamers and things like that.



Joel 06:47

Yeah, it's funny, you know, so Tom, Tom did a fair amount of your fishing. steelhead fishing in Idaho as a younger man. And so he actually used some fiberglass rods and we make 8 weight single and fiberglass rods. And so certainly, you know, that was back kind of before the revolution hit, you know, in the 70s 60s and 70s out there, but the seven Wait, we actually make in two different versions Don't get ahead of ourselves too much. But we in the process of prototyping that rod, we found two different blanks that we really liked one that's stiffer and we kind of consider to be more of a kind of light salt water bonefish kind of rod and then one that's a little softer. There's more of a progressive action trout rod. So you know softer one we like a lot for streamer fishing for trout here in Montana. You know seeing tip lines and the stiffer rod would be more your full swing tip or even, you know light steelhead, like bonefish, light solar stuff. Yeah.



Dave S 07:38

Yeah, as I say, I think that seven way would probably work great for summer steelhead, especially, you know, something a little bit lighter, not going for the monster, the bigger fish. Okay. And so now how do you guys I mean, Massachusetts and Denver? How did you guys meet and and come into? Where are you at now?



Matt 07:55

Well, yeah, I lived in Denver for about 20 years. And Joel obviously grew up there and we met in Denver. So fish, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, and just fished a ton together. And both of us were probably in similar places in our work life, you know, working our butts off but needing a change, you need something a little more substance. And I started talking with Tom and his wife Jerry about the company and they had an up for sale. So Joel and I, you know, kind of I don't know if we were serious at first we started taking a look at it and the more you know, we fell in love with the company they started courting us and we were courting them and kind of go back and forth. We we moved our families up to Bozeman and for about three years.



Dave S 08:45

No kidding,



Joel 08:46

yeah, kind of admitted midlife crisis with that young sons. And we're trying to figure out a way to have a life where we could be outside more and not be on planes and not be working late and the over dinner in Bozeman is a pretty special place you've ever been out here. Universities here. So the town is a pretty lively place and the skiing and the fishing, the hunting access is pretty unbelievable. You know, and it's a it's a small town, but it has a great airport and just checked a lot of the boxes for us. And then of course, you know, we'll talk more about it, but you go and meet somebody like Tom Morgan and start talking to him about what he does and, and how he does it and hearing stories and it's it's pretty amazing. As a place to live and work.



Dave S 09:23

Yeah, his cool. So yeah, let's get into that. So Tom Morgan, I mean, I've I read some some of the stuff on Tom. I mean, I didn't know the background. Like I said, the only thing I knew about Tom Morgan, it's pretty cool shows you a lot about the company is that I knew they were one of the best, you know, the rod company rod makers in the world pretty much and but other than that, I didn't know much and as I dug into the story, yeah, maybe you can just talk about that. Because that whole thing how he was had, you know, Ms. And basically, I think for 17 years, you know, transitioned to where he didn't build any of the rods, can you can you talk about how a little bit about the whole Tom Morgan story of where he came from how he got into I think Winston and then into Tom Morgan. Sure.

M

Matt 10:04

So Tom grew up in ns as a kid and his parents on the western motel and he started guiding on Odell Creek and on the Madison and the Ruby and all around there and learn those waters and, and really learned how to teach people how to fish by watching his clients and watching what they needed. He went on to own a fly shop Enis for a bit and ran that for a while. And in the early 70s - 1971, I believe Winston was up for sale. And Tom purchased Winston in San Francisco. And we like to joke because people say did you guys build rods before you want the company? And we asked Tom, that question. We said, Nope, Tom, we're not professional rod builders. You know, I don't know about buying this company said, Don't worry, I bought Winston, I'd never built a rod in my life, you know, and so. So Tom had Winston in San Francisco for two years, and then moved it back to twin bridges, obviously, where it's still located today and ran it until the early 90s. So a lot of those really famous green sticks that came out of Winston were designed by Tom and in the team there. And in he worked side by side of Enet and Glen Brackett just, you know, really a lot of that storied history of where Winston came from today. And in the early 90s, he sold it to David Adachi, who still currently owns Winston.

J

Joel 11:37

So it's it's interesting story, I think you're right, there's a lot of layers to it. So there's the kind of the aspect of Tom is the fishing guide, and the fisherman, which I think really informed a lot of the choices he made when he started designing rods, I think it's always interesting, we tell people this, and I love the example of it. They're different rod companies out there, I think it's always useful when you really get into it, to think about the rod designers and the people that started those companies and where they come from, you know, and some people are more tournament casters, and they have a different focus when it designer odd as opposed to somebody that's a fishing guide, who really sees the challenges of fishing and design a rod with that in mind. And I think your your background and your history and your knowledge base really informs the choices you make. And so I think here at Tom Morgan, we talk about it a lot, we make rods that are meant to be fished, because they're designed to challenge to handle the challenges of fishing, especially the way we fish here in Montana. And that's why the design the rods move, the way they do they flex the way they do and then they're built the way they are. And that's just your Tom's history and background that really created that focus, and was most important to him. So we talk a lot about, you know, feel, and loading the rods and protecting the tip and how you fight fish and, you know, all that kind of stuff a lot more than we talk about butt power or casting distance or things like that, because they seem less important when you're actually fishing here. Not that the aren't important things in different environments. You know, if you're in Florida, you got to have the ability to you know, to cast, 80 or 90 feet with with one back back cast. So, you know, just different

environments. And I think that that's a really an interesting thing to think about. And we're lucky that way because it'll make a lot of our rods. So we get to talk to people about how they fish and where they fish. And it's not that each action is customized for the client. But we like to think that each rod choice or the model they choose is customized for where they are and how they fish.

M

Matt 13:20

Yeah, so after just give you a little bit of a run up there. So after selling Winston, Tom and his wife Gerry, who met his wife, Gerry, we're living right outside of Bozeman, and Tom developed MS And it was a pretty rapid progression that he went to quadriplegic couldn't, couldn't use his hands or feet. So there's a myth out of the misconception. But at Tom Morgan RodSmith, Tom has never built one of the rods that that we sell, because he was paralyzed. So he taught his wife Gerry how to build rods she is not a fisherman had never built rods before. And he taught her all the individual steps. And one of the things while Tom was at Winston is he always wanted to make a rod and not worry about you know the price as it related to wholesale rods and then the markups and things he wanted to make what he thought of as close to perfect of a rod as you could have so it meant the nicest cork the the you know really special pearls of wood agate stripping God's nickel silver hardware custom engraved for him. And he didn't want to be constrained by you know, trying to turn out thousands of rods a year to fly shops. So he'd always had this dream of a small Custom Shop. And then when he was faced with the paralysis, it became a reality that they needed to find work to do for the two of them. So they started Tom Morgan RodSmith's in the early 90s. As a country And rod shop. And we currently make bamboo graphite and fiberglass rods in a variety of two through eight, depending upon the material.

J

Joel 15:10

It's interesting that i think that i think that, you know, one of the things that Tom i think is known for maybe within the industry more so than without it is, I think his kind of obsession with quality. And I really don't know where that came from. I don't know if he was always that way, or if rod building kind of created that within him. But he he had kind of a philosophy on quality that I think is, is the hardest thing about bowling rods the way we do, because I think he wanted every single step to be performed at the highest level of quality to the point where you get maybe that the sum is greater than the the whole the parts, you know what I mean? Like, if you skip anywhere along the line, it makes a difference in the final product. And I think Tom was kind of on the industry, especially when he bought Winston saying and you know, these rods could be much nicer than they are much higher quality. And so I think that was kind of a drive for him throughout his life

is to figure out how can we make this the very, very best. And I think in a production environment, as Matt alluded to, he found that there were limitations there. When it comes to, you know, the time you can spend on a rod, the materials you can choose, given the margin and the volume requirements. And I think part of what what drove him in his sort of semi retirement to build a custom shop was that idea that maybe he could try to build the perfect rod, I don't think that the perfect rod exists yet. You know, it's kind of one of those things that's more more of an aspirational goal and a real goal, but it pushes you to make everything as good as you possibly can. And I think for Tom that was kind of his, his his journey, you know, and it's interesting, the story has so many layers to it. It's not only, you know, Tom, the rod designer, it's Tom, the husband and partner of his wife, Gerry and how that translated into what they did and how they did things. And and as he became more physically infirm, how his mental outlook on designing and exploring materials and writing about rod design and things like that increased, as he was physically able to do less and less and less. It's a remarkable story of a man and a husband and a rod designer, kind of all wrapped up in one.



Dave S 16:59

Yeah, yeah. And the story going back, you know, again, when he transitioned from Winston to Tom Morgan, so did you. And he basically, you said he didn't build any rods for Tom Morgan from from the start? Or was that? Or did he build some and then transition in as the as the MS came on?



Matt 17:16

No, they I mean, I think the formation of Tom Morgan, RodSmiths was always an idea that he had, but it was necessitated by his illness. So I think they created it in a way to work from their home to stay doing something that they were that he was passionate about, to create some income. So it really was born out of necessity. But he certainly, you know, as far as designing went, though, I mean, he he designed every single rod that we have. And he built, what he learned to do was to rely on others and create a really collaborative process. So for prototyping, he would have some trusted casters come in and cast in the front driveway. And he would sit in his chair and watch how the rug flexed and get their feedback. And they knew that the action that he was after, and then he would go back to the spreadsheets and using voice to text, make alterations to the spreadsheets and the patterns, and then have you know, new prototypes rolled, and then go back out again. So he wasn't physically casting them. But these are all of Tom's designs in the way that he thought



Dave S 18:26

trout rocks should behave. Right? Well, that. Yeah, that is pretty amazing. And I was thinking about it earlier, the way that it came together. So basically, with you guys now. I mean, you've taken over this company, how do you kind of live up to that expectation? Do you see that as a big challenge for you guys? And people I'm sure from the outside are like, well, Tom Morgan is gone. You know, and I compare it to kind of almost the Steve Jobs thing, right, apple? It was all about this guy, Steve Jobs, he disappears. You wonder how does Apple make it? But how would you guys how do you guys do? Yeah,



Joel 18:57

well, first of all, I think our market caps a little lower than apple? For sure. Yeah, it's interesting. I think, in some ways, I think we were helped by the fact that we've never built roads before. So we joke, you know, any habits we have the bad or good are Tom and Jerry's habits. So we don't really know a different way to do it. So we didn't have to overcome any bad habits or any other shortcuts or any of the other things we might have had to hadn't been really seasoned rod builders. But I think you're right, we spent a lot of time the first year or two years even kind of answering those questions. And I think people want to see if the quality changed, or if the product changed, or, you know, we were really lucky that we were able to keep almost all the same vendors who supply our parts that Tom had and over time curated new list of really superlative suppliers, we were able to keep the same team of people that had worked with Tom for so many years, and learn from them kind of on a daily basis. And, and I think that they were pretty good about you know, not letting us go so to speak. They didn't really let us leave the house and the shop that it was in their house until they felt comfortable. We're making rods though we're at or above the quality they had made them at. So sometimes I think we joke I, you know, I think we take it pretty seriously and maybe hold ourselves even to a more impossible standard? Because we don't know. Any other way to do it.



Dave S 20:08

Gotcha. How do you guys stay at? I mean, you're at this level, I think it's something, you know, if somebody puts an order in with you guys, it takes depending on the rod, you know, good, you know, six months or so right in that range? How do you guys I mean, do you talk about the potential of increasing production? I mean, this whole scaling thing, right, when you think of companies that the scaling profit, you know, process, you know, do you guys just avoid that? Or how do you you know, what, what are your plans for the long term with this?

M

Matt 20:35

So, you know, I think that, if we asked him that question said, Where's How big can this go, and he said, I can't give you a number. But as you're building the rods, if you are finding temptation to cut corners, or order inferior supplies, or you find the quality of the work going down, then you've reached that place. So we're really not looking to ramp up into, you know, massive production numbers and supply every fly shop in America with one of our rods, it just, it doesn't make sense from from the cost of materials and labor. And it's just not a company founded on that. You know, so what we're doing is we're growing gradually, you know, we're making more rounds this year than we did last year and more rods last year than the year before that. But we're constantly keeping an eye on are we stretching things is quality, you know, suffering, and right now, we're really happy that it's not, we know that we have the ability to make some more rods in 2020 than we made this year, but we're not trying to, you know, exponentially blow that up.

J

Joel 21:41

Yeah, and I think, you know, the answer is long term, I don't think we ever see this being a really big company, it'll always be pretty small, but be a little bigger than it is now. And we might grow really slowly. But I think for us, the most important thing is to make sure we maintain that, that story and that heritage and the way that Tom don't rods, so I don't think that can ever really be done on a mass scale. We still want to have contact with our customers and, and be able to make choices that are appropriate for them and have their feedback when build rods.



Dave S 22:08

That's right. Yeah. Because you you guys know every customer, right? By kind of first name basis and the rods are in there, you're working on them and and what is it like when you know, if you take it, can you take you know, take us to your, the factory floor? Maybe? What's it like it when you open that door? And you look at you guys, what do we what would we see if we walked in there today?

M

Matt 22:27

Yeah, so we're sitting here today, it's not, not not this fancy factory, it's, you know, it's a great spot here in Bozeman. And we do it all in here. Everything from the office to the bamboo production to every step of the build process is all happening here, under one roof. There's five of us that that work in the shop. And we really made it a focus to all be cross trained, so that no one person is responsible for just one step of the process. So that,

you know, we can kind of keep from getting bored and bounce in and out of doing the work we do. But the process is, for example, yesterday, we took some orders on rods and and we're working with that customer sold a couple eight foot four weights. And they were you know, we were talking about handle shape and handle length and what color the blank will be because we do need to red or clear coat. We talked about species of wood for the for the reel seat hardware or for the reel seat and then and then the type of hardware, what kind of inscription or calligrapher is going to do so there's a really personalized approach to design that rod, and even backing up and getting to the specific length and weight. We're talking. These are actually a couple customers from Japan that I took out for a day of fishing this summer. And they tried a bunch of different rods and landed on the one that they wanted for the type of fishing that they do. So you know, we're really, really involved talking with our customers. Luckily, we've fished a lot of rivers and know for the most part where they're fishing and type of fishing they're doing so it's a really personalized process.



Joel 24:05

Yeah, the Japanese rods are interesting because they fish for a small trout they're called the Shaku I think it is and they wanted we do a 20 inch fish mark on a lot of our almost all of our rods they wanted a 300 millimeter fish mark which is slightly 11 and five eighths inches or something like that. So we figured out a way to do the mark that's for their for that type of little fish that lives in the mountains of Japan I guess that's the that's the goal is a 300 millimeter fish. So yeah, we figured out a way to do that. But I would say on any given day you're gonna find Matt and I either on the phones, either returning messages doing sales or some part of the build process, you know, coding rods, building handles, you know, shipping bamboo, we kind of do all rod building stuff and more ownership duties, what you might think of, and everybody kind of cross trains, as Matt says, it's funny to think of as a factory. It's really we call it a shop. It's funny that everything does come out of here and we try to do as much as we can here. And then obviously, from a vendor standpoint, we start looking for vendors in Montana, then we look in the West, and then we kind of look nationwide. And we really work hard to make sure all of our stuff comes from America.



Dave S 25:09

Yeah. And is the other another five people. So now is Gerry still building rods she's not.



Matt 25:15

She she's happily pursuing her art, which is really was her passion before building rods and continues to be. But I was just on the phone with her yesterday asking her a question about one of the vendors and in the manufacturing process for one of our parts. So she's still very much in a consulting role comes by the shop when she's in town and getting groceries and things and helps us out. But as far as day to day production goes, as Joel talked about earlier, they really had this philosophy of gradual release, where they taught us each step until we could do it as well as she was. And then when we could master that step, then we stepped into that step. And she continued the other parts of the build. And it wasn't until she and Tom were able to look at a rod and say that they couldn't tell if Gerry had built it, or if we had built it, that they let it fly and move out of their home shop.



Dave S 26:07

Like I said that the story is there more of the deep deeper dive, I'll put a couple links, but as far as the building of the rod, can you just walk us through, you know, maybe a few of the, you know, kind of some tips, and I'm going into right now I'm starting to build a couple rods that are you know, on the side, and you know, doing a little process here, and it's interesting, cuz I haven't built a rod in probably 20 years or more. Yeah, in, you know, it's still a little bit of a, there's a little bit of a struggle on some of the things but can you give me, maybe just some tips on how if somebody was building a rod, how they might you know, how you guys started off and go through that process really quick? Sure.



Matt 26:40

Um, you know, I'll jump into some of those tips in a second. But one thing I want to back up, Tom was a huge helper of anybody that reached out to people always said they were surprised about how much information he offered, and that he didn't keep a lot of his tips and tricks close to the vest. So, you know, people would write to him and say, how did you do this, whether it was a bamboo build, or graphite build, and he happily talked about dimensions and techniques and things. And so we've tried to keep that alive. One of the things that we started about a year and a half ago was teaching bamboo rod building classes where folks come out to the shop. And in groups of MAX SIZE of about four people, they'll spend a week in our shop and go from column to rod and use one of our tapers and end up with a fishable Rod by the end of the week, so we both are building custom rods for customers, but also really pursuing the education around building. So yeah, so you know, I think one of the biggest things that stands out in my mind top there's a lot of sayings that we have around the shop that Tom when he talked about building and one that sticks in my mind is he used to say, you know, don't hold on to a mistake just because it took you a long time to make it. And in Rob building for me, that's especially

true if I've been working on a handle and I glued up the cork and it's on the blank and I'm working on it and I look at it and it's just proportionately not right. And it's now too small You know, I think there's a tendency to say man and this took a lot of hours it can be a huge pain to cut it off and start over and so one of the things I really try to internalize is that if you know if it's not done right, it's not worth doing so you know, we've been known to to set ourselves back a couple days on a build of a rod or even more just correct something that probably the customer wouldn't even notice but it's important for us to chase



Joel 28:40

that Yeah, we think about that quite a bit there's just a robber just did that it's not even that the customer would notice the defect but if you know about it Tom kind of taught that it you know, if we see it or magnification it might be very hard for somebody else to find it but if we know it's not right it's kind of that you have to be true to that to that feeling true to that knowledge and and so we you know oftentimes had to disappoint customers by saying this rods not right you know, we're gonna have to start over but that's kind of what we do you know, we know that's that's that's our niche is to make sure your rods as perfect as it can be before it leaves the door.



Dave S 29:12

And do you guys do mostly I mean are you doing four piece? I mean, do you do two pieces What do you guys mix things up there?



Matt 29:20

I think one of the unique things is the way Tom designed the blanks is that they start out and they can be built as I fish a two piece nine foot six wait here in Montana on about you know on some of the bigger rivers and I don't know a lot of companies making a two piece nine foot rod but since we're lucky not to have to get on the airplane. We prefer two piece when we don't have to fly but certainly recognize that that's not the reality in the way most of the rods today are sold so we can make them into a war for piece.



Joel 29:49

Yeah, we're sell a lot of two piece rods for people here in Montana or AF places here and they're just it's just a sweeter rod you have to do more if you're gonna put, you know two extra joints in Iran. It's it changes the blank more



Dave S 29:59

does that Change, I mean, the action considerably, just your to your two piece versus the four,



Matt 30:05

I think in our rods, you know, if you're fishing a rod, that's a really stiff rod through the bud. And for most of it out to a tip flex, you don't notice it as much. But Tom's design philosophy was start with the finest tip possible, and then haven't even read the progression all the way back to the handle. So when we're prototyping around, even up in like a six weight, if it doesn't load deeply from the tip to the handle, you know, in you can't feel it load at 25 feet, then it's not one of our rods. So for us with a rod designed to bend like that. And to fish like that, then two more ferals is noticeable. Yet



Joel 30:45

interesting point that makes about when we prototype rods, one of the very first things we asked, we asked our test casters is to start casting at 25 feet, you know, don't pull out to 50 or 60 or 70 feet to get the rod, we want to feel that rod close. Because so much of your fishing is 25 to 40 feet for trout, you know you're not it's not really a distance game consistently. So we want to make sure that that those rods are responsive and have feel close. And we know they're going to load out longer. And we're not going to put a heavy line on them. We're not going to, you know, kind of any tricks to try to load and close? Because for us that feels the most important thing.



Dave S 31:21

Gotcha. No, that makes total sense. I want to go back to the ROB billing. I think that rod billing class sounds like an awesome resource. So you guys, is that something similar to your rods? Right? If somebody orders a rod, it's going to take a while to get it? I mean, how do you get into that classes? That's something where they go to your website, they call you up?



Matt 31:37

Yeah, on the website, you know, we just published our 2020 dates. So we're, we've got dates out through August right now. And we actually have openings at all of those classes. So if someone's interested in the dates fit, you know, we're offering pretty much one a month to come out for the week and do it. So definitely something to look into. But

coming back around, you know, as a aspirational, Rod builder, I think one of the things for me is in terms of shaping handles is I would get a you know, a mandrel and start with shaping handles off the rod and just start messing around on the lathe and mess up and, and play with different shapes and see what happens. And before you know, it really matters. You know, one of our philosophies is rather than buying pre formed handles pre shaped handles, and sliding them onto the rod. You know, Tom had us drilling out each core to match the taper of the rod, and then gluing each cork on to the rod. So it connected with the blank connected with each other. And then we shade each customer's handle individually. So there's a lot more consequence to messing up on a handle once it's been glued to the rod. So I would start with messing up some handles off the rod before having to cut them off.



Dave S 32:53

So yeah, maybe we just take it back really quickly to the process on the actual rod. So before you even get into putting the handle on, you know everything there. Can you talk about first, you know, just the basics, the mandrel can you talk about that process and where your blanks how that comes together? What a mandrel is just kind of briefly.



Joel 33:09

Yeah, sure. So if you're not familiar with how we make graphite and fiberglass blanks, basically, there's some choices you make when you're making rods. And we alluded to that kind of in the pattern. And so we call the rolls of graphite or fiberglass fabric. And so you take that roll of fabric and you cut it essentially like a sail cloth. So at the butt end, it's wider. And at the tip end, it's narrower, it's essentially tapered like the sail on a ship. And the way you cut that can make a lot of difference in the way the rod turns out. Basically, that cloth is then tacked with an iron essentially, onto a mandrel. The mandrel is a long steel tube with a constant rate of taper. And then that that fabric that's wrapped onto the minerals then wrapped on the outside with cellophane tape on your pressure. And that creates a little bit tighter adherence to the mandrel and then that whole thing is baked in an oven. And that's what sets the resin content in the fabric and makes it stiff. Then it comes out of the oven and then you use a pneumatic rod or metal puller that pulls the mandrel out and you're left with the hollow cylinder of the cure resin fabric. And so the choices you make you choose a lot of things in the fabric, you choose what type of resin and and the thread count or the fabric area we that you want through certain things. And then the flag pattern dictates the amount of overlap that you're going to have once it's rolled on the mandrel. And there's things you can do with compounding tapers and and all different it can be about as complicated as you can imagine. There's during these you can mix materials. You know, you can have a different material at certain parts of the rod or

over the ferrels and things like that. You can reinforce internally on where the ferrels points are. There's a lot of things you can do to change that resulting action. You know, we're really lucky in that we learned from Tom and we have the benefit of having Tom's patterns that over decades he honed. You know that that sense of knowing what a number translates to in a rod flex and feeling of the rod is really something I don't know if we totally have yet that's decades of casting and prototyping rods to feel, you know what the differences in this overlap versus that or, or this this tape or versus that in the way the rod feels. And so, you know, we're really lucky and proud to say that, you know, some of the rods we build are the same rods that Tom Morgan RodSmiths has been building for 25 years, you know, and Tom's philosophy on rods was good fishing rods don't become bad fishing rods. And that's kind of part of our philosophy is we really feel like you know, you buy a really good trout rod you buy a once we'll use a hard for a long time. You know, they don't roll over our model lineup doesn't roll over every three years. You know, we're not going to tell a customer the that the rod you bought 10 or 15 or 20 years ago, isn't still a really good rod. And we can we're able to do that because we don't make a lot of rods, you know, we're not, you know, making thousands and thousands of rods over a year. So that's a we're kind of fortunate to be able to have that philosophy and stick to it.



Dave S 35:53

And now a quick word from our sponsors. The Fly fishing and tying journal has a great fall edition that's out right now. You can find Lucas Stevens who visits Winston fly rods in the fall edition for an insider look and a rare interview with Ted Leeson. Patrick wall pays homage to Harry the mirrors tied in hand Atlantic salmon flies displayed in the margaree Museum, boots Owl and takes us to the pond with a masterclass in Stillwater, Dennis dobble travels to Scotland in search of a salmon Atlantic salmon. Plus deputy editor of the fly fishing time journal Henry Hughes has a mysterious fly fishing story plus much more. I'd love if you can stop right now. Just press pause and just head over to wet fly swing comm slash f t j and subscribe to the magazine. And you'll get that that issue delivered right to your your mailbox that's wet fly swing comm slash f t J. We're also supported by so fly gear led by Chief apparel guru and Team USA youth fly fishing member james Carlin who has a clothing line you're definitely going to love. So flies mission is to produce clothes that look good, perform well and can be worn on and off the water. Plus, most importantly, are manufactured under rigorously sustainable methods. How do they do it? bamboo and a single word a fabric that is buttery soft to the touch, durable, sun resistant and highlighted with great artwork. I've been wearing this so fly hoodie, pretty much all year now. And I just can't take it off whether I'm fishing or hunting. It's pretty amazing. So you gotta check it out. It really works great in all conditions, it's light, it's soft, all good. And just want to let you know you can go to wet fly swing.com

slash so fly. That's wet fly swing comm slash so fly to get started today, if you go to that link and show your support for the podcast, you will assure that we will be able to create more content indefinitely and infinitely. Okay, back to the show. Wow, that's that's really cool. So that explains it. Thanks for you know, clarifying that. So basically you, you get these, you know, you get the rod, I guess you have a local company that's building, you know, essentially making that

**J** Joel 38:19

yes, a couple suppliers use a couple of suppliers that rule our blanks. We're not at the size or we're gonna have our own blank bowling facility. Unfortunately, we'd love it because from a prototyping standpoint, it's nice to just say, hey, let's roll this today and see how it casts. So it's a little more lengthy procedure for us. But yeah, we own all the manuals and the patterns and so basically we pay somebody to make them based on specs for the fabric and the resin and the batteries that when they supply them with us. Yep.

**M** Matt 38:44

And then from there, you know, basically you and I've talked you've said I want a 2 piece eight and a half foot four weight and I want the red blank as opposed to the clean blank so we coat the blanks in house. And then we will ferrell it we use spigot farrells for all of our Farrell's and will Ferrell it to the length and the number of pieces that you're after. And then we start through the process we depending on if you want up locking or down blocking hardware that determines where we glue the cork, and then we glue the cork directly on to the blank. Tom thought that that made a difference for the connection from the casting and the playing of fish translating down the blank through the handle into your hand by having a really tight connection. We shape it based on your preferences. We start with either a Western cigar or full wells as kind of our stock handles but people send us drawings and measurements and pictures of favorite handles. So you know that's part of that custom process. And then we wrap and have our calligrapher come in and she's a local here in Bozeman does a beautiful job writing whatever you'd like us to write on the rod and then and then we go into coating and coating is another spot as a as an aspiring Rob builder. I think that, you know, some tips from Tom are pretty helpful.

**J** Joel 40:09

Yeah, I think so the process Matt just talked about, there's been a couple of tips in there too. So I don't know, as a home builder, I'm trying to think what's feasible, what we can give you. feasible?



Dave S 40:18

Well, what is what is the difference between a home builder say, somebody that's just got this one rod, their bill, and they've got, you know, the basic setup versus what you guys have there?



Joel 40:25

Well, I don't think we're a technology standpoint really that much different. But I can tell you like when we get blanks in, so we deflect every single blank we get, because we want to make sure that it meets Tom's standard for the specific line weight. So we deflect tips and butts,



Dave S 40:39

well, what's the what's the diff? What do you mean by deflect?



Joel 40:41

So deflection is basically when you have you hang a standard weight on the end of the blank, and it's held static on a board. And we can measure how deeply it bends with that weight for a tip, right, but not everyone's deflection board is different, you know, different maker might have a different weights, they might have a different like board, you know, so it really is only true to what we use for us. You know, it's like an individual thing, a deflection board. But we look at each tip and but it makes sure that they bend the way, let's say five weight should bend for us, you know, for that pattern. And if it's too stiff, it gets rejected. If it's too soft, it gets rejected. If it's within a certain margin, a pretty tight margin, than the slightly stiff ones get matched with the slightly stiff butts. So the slightly stiff button tips go together and the slightly soft bun tips go together and the dead on button tips go together. So we try to create a recipe between the two sections that maintains the nice progressive action across them. And then we record that for customers. We know if you know john edwards breaks his tip. We know what is that when we do is repair. So we kind of you know every step along that way, we try to take every single detail and quantify it so that it's not a mystery. If we ever have to repair or rebuild that, then we take those blanks very rarely are blanks perfectly straight. So we straighten them. And so you can straight away it's by applying heat and pressure. Now we have kind of a do Hickey or we call them Morganisms, these tools Tom invented that we use for that. I don't know if a home builder be interested in that. But



Dave S 42:00

is this different than the like the spline where you look where you find the spline and defer that



Joel 42:04

one? Yeah, so so straightening for us is is sweeping curves that may or may not correlate to the spline, the splines a little different. And Matt can kind of talk about finding the spline and our philosophy on splines. But the spline is basically the area of the maximum overlap. So if you think back to where you overlapped it, at one point in the rod, where that that flag ends is going to be the most material overlap in the rod. And that creates the spline down the length of the blank.



Matt 42:32

I don't remember I'll have to dig it up. I could probably see if I can find in Florida to you. But there was a great article maybe a year and a half ago, one of the builders at Thomas and Thomas was talking about this philosophy of finding the spline and you know, why I really liked the article was that there was a lot of consensus on how to find the spline, but almost no consensus on what to do with it. Once you did find it. I thought it was great. They talked about, you know, Orvis his approach to using the spline and some people did on the back and so on under the guides, and some on the side for accuracy. And it's just a really interesting



Dave S 43:06

that I love that because that's that's one of those things where I write down just by display to summarize, you know, as listed there say, Well, you know, splines not important nowadays, because, you know, the rods are pretty straight with a four piece rod, it's not that big of a deal. But you can, you can hold the tip of the rod at least and roll it and it will snap, and it'll show you where the spline is. But yeah, that's the thing. Where do you put the guys in the bottom or the top of where that spline is? It's kind of funny.



Matt 43:28

Yeah. And, yeah, I think there's a lot that goes into that everything, you know, we like to also talk around the shop about everything matters, and everything from Tom's guide, spacing charts. So Tom's philosophy was to use smaller guide sets than probably a lot of the modern rods are, he thought that it kept the line from losing energy by chattering

back and forth and kept it more in line with casting, the spacing between guides, you know, everything matters to how the rod feels. So think like Joel said, a couple times were really, really lucky that we got all of Tom's designs, obviously, as part of the company. But as we played the prototypes and started to do some of our own work, we realized how every little thing from the amount of thread wraps the amount of coating the amount that the weight of the individual guides and the sum of the weight of those guides. It all matters it. It really does. I used to think, you know, people were making that up or nobody can really feel that when it cast but it really doesn't matter.



Joel 44:31

And Tom would say it matters more at the tip than does the but all these things. The more you do it the tip, lever arm, you know, and so you do as little as possible, he would say that the blanks are perfect. And the more you do to them just messes them up.



Dave S 44:45

Oh, yeah. And then how would you determine the space? If you had that say that eight foot four away? You know, how would you guys determine? I mean, obviously, you've built those before so you could copy what you did before but how would you determine the spacing or how would somebody



Matt 44:57

I think, you know, Mike McCoy at snake brain guides has a great chart. So if you buy rec I'm sure has it as well, you know, there are some generic spacings for info as a good starting point, you know, and generally, the width between the tip top and the first guide, it's a little bigger between the first guy and the second guy a little bigger between the second guy. You know, it really matters if you're building a two piece rod or a four piece rod, where you want those guides to fall in relation to, you know, a reinforcing wrap around the feral. So sometimes you have to adjust them. But I think back to your your last question about what's different between a home builder shop and in our shop. And it's really, we just have a lot of jigs and a lot of purpose built machinery that's used for one step of the build process. And if I was doing this in my home garage, I could achieve a similar outcome. But I'd have to kind of get creative with some of my different tools. I might not own a lathe, so I might turn a handle on a drill or a drill press or something like that. Whereas we have one laid specifically set up totally to turn handles in a second laid only for fairly bamboo rods and doing other you know, work in the shop. So that's where I think we're lucky for guide spacing, we happen to have some, some boards that have the,

you know, original markings from when Tom and Jerry designed them and we lay the blank down on the board and then just use a you know, a white grease pencil and go down and make marks where each guide should be.



Dave S 46:30

Yeah, that makes sense. Okay, going back to the rod. So you guys basically you know, you're building the rod like you normally you put the handle on, although you guys mentioned you build the handle, you're not just sliding it over the down the blank length, then, what's the next step you guys go into? Do you kind of go to the tip top and then start wrapping the guides?



Matt 46:46

Yeah, so I think so that Yeah, we tip top the rod. And there were looking for straightness, you know, across the ferals, whether it's to piece or 4 piece, getting everything lined up. Often it corresponds with the spline, but you know, we're looking to make sure that that's straight when it fits together. And then as far as wrapping goes, You know, I don't know as far as tips to wrapping, I find that when we do bamboo classes, that people who have done a lot of fly tying gravitate naturally to wrapping rods, it's it's similar fine motor. I don't have a whole lot of magic tricks there other than patience. And you know, again, if you have a tag end or a double wrap, even if it's on an ornamental wrap, it's taking you a long time to do you just gotta flick it off with your thumb and in you say you wrap that guide and then you get your looper thread and stick it through and pull it through. Is that how you how do you tie it off, so you hide that little, you know, that little nip that you do with the razor This is gonna be really interesting for me to describe on a podcast. So basically, a loop of five x Tippet that I've tied into a, maybe a three inch loop, and about five wraps out from the end. Now again, with our level of, of precision, I measure every single rack with a pair of calipers and every wrap matches, and I count the number of wraps on everything. So it's either I know it's exactly, you know, 750 long, or I know that it's 20 wraps than three wraps of brass, and 15 more wraps than three wraps of brass. So I either have counts in my head or measurements. And I match the two wraps on the guide using calipers. But I stopped about five reps short of the end, put that loop of five x onto the blank, and then continue to wrap those five wraps. So that loop is wrapped underneath. And then when you cut the thread off of the spool, you drop it through that loop. And there's a couple of different techniques depending on if I'm wrapping bamboo or graphite, whether I just snug it up and pop it off, or pull it all the way through. And that kind of sometimes depends on tips versus butts or if I'm teaching somebody new versus somebody that's done it a bunch, but yeah, basically, you're just burying the end of that thread under four or five laps underneath.



Dave S 49:13

And why not and why use the five x versus just using the thread you're wrapping with an extra, you



Matt 49:19

know, the five X to me, is thinner, thinner, but it's also strong enough that I can use a loop of five x, you know, all the way down a rod kind of thing without breaking it. Because when it breaks, you almost always have to redo the wrap. So that that's kind of a



Dave S 49:35

gotcha. Okay.



Matt 49:37

And the other thing I'd say about tip to building that we find is I'm either in the right mood to rap or I'm not and if I wrap around when I'm not in the right move, it doesn't look great. You know, I think like anything, whether it's sitting down to tie flies or sitting down to shape the handle, like don't force it, you know, obviously we have to build rods and don't have luxury of saying this week I don't feel like it. But I try to look at different parts of the day when I'm when I'm feeling like my eyes are good and my hands feel good not jump out and wrap. But if I'm exhausted or feeling impatient, it's not the time to sit and try to do that.



Dave S 50:13

That's right. That's right. Are you guys? I'm not sure. I'm not sure your age, bro. You guys have glasses and stuff like that, at that level? We're



Matt 50:21

in our young 40s in our fighting the readers. I know.



Dave S 50:28

You're not you're not far away. But I'm telling you, you got a few years you're gonna be stuck. But I, I still have and I what I put them on. It's just it's a world of difference. But I still avoid it. Because I'm like, No, I'm not going there yet.

M

Matt 50:39

This season. I'm like, embarrassed to say I'm that guy. Now with this, click on the one click together, you know, to tie the knots on my flies. And I use them when I'm wrapping rods, we also use a magnifying you know, like they kind of go over your head? And oh, yeah, the magnifiers quite a bit different steps in the process.

J

Joel 50:59

Sure. Yeah, I was gonna say. So after wrapping, you know, we go into coding. And my first tip I had for you about coating is I do everything under magnification anymore. Like I just you see the edges so much better, you see the margins so much better, you can assess whether there's, you know, whether it's good, or it's bad, or there's a bubble or you know, all those things show up so much easier when you're using magnification. So we pretty much constantly do that, you know, for two reasons to make sure the quality is really there. And then we also pretty good if you can't see with magnification that you're not going to see it when you're fishing or when you're looking at your rod when you get it or, or something like that. So we use lots and lots of magnification. And, and we do we do coating a little different too. So you know, we use a flexible epoxy resin for our coating, but we do a lot of coats. So I think most production places are doing maybe one or two coats. And we typically do you know, five to seven coats, very thin coats and we sand between coats. So we look for little defects or bumps from tag ends.



Dave S 51:51

sand, you don't use a razor blade to cut off.

J

Joel 51:54

You know, one of the things we found with razor blades is if your razor blade and you can actually create a flat defect that can reflect the light. So you'll see oh, you know, so that's it. You know, it may work fine for the homebuilder. We don't we didn't want that. So if you do use a razor blade, I'd say you need to sand after you use the razor blade. Oh, yeah, in some ways, you're just saying.



Matt 52:15

Gotcha. To be clear, when we're talking about sanding. You know, we're talking about 1500 to 2000. Yeah. All right, sitting there with 80 grit.



Joel 52:23

Yep. So yes, we do lots of coats. And coating press, it's kind of like, you know, it's done when it's done. And there's couple parts of our process that aren't really happening entirely qualifiable, you just kind of know what the look is you're looking for. And, and you can look at and say this is done. And this isn't, it may have been seven coats or even five coats. And it just kind of depends on the day. And sometimes at the end of the pot, the epoxy is a little thicker in the beginning, it's thinner. And so there's a lot of things that go into that, we also always recommend heating your epoxy a little bit. So we just use a flexcut epoxy, we can get it to about 100 degrees that just handles much better, mixes better works better on the brushes, we use nice brushes, so we don't use disposable brushes, and we use nice brushes and clean them. Because we feel like the nicer brush that better bristles fewer air bubbles,



Dave S 53:06

what kind of what would be a nice



Joel 53:07

like seal brushes, your brushes are like five or seven bucks instead of 25 cents. Okay, so that gives you an idea. And different people like different sizes of brushes, we tend to use pretty small brushes, because we like to be able to really detail the edges and you know, get things really even in flat. And so the idea of the multiple coaches is just gives you a flatter finish. So you're always battling footballs and, and dumbbells, like they went down to a dumbbell. And if you don't have a dumbbell, then you get too thick in the middle that turns into a football. So you're kind of going back and forth, we always try to create a really flat flat surface that doesn't really stand out too much from the road. Gotcha.



Dave S 53:45

And are you guys spinning this to dry it? Or is that



Joel 53:48

something we are so yeah, we check it on it. Another difference between a home shop and ours might be we just we Chuck things on a motor to coat them with the brush, and then we spit them on a drum you have and that just keeps it so that dries nice and flat and even. You have your hanging to dry. Obviously, epoxy is still curing, so it sag towards the floor because of gravity. So we rotate them on a drum, usually, you know, three, four hours, it'll set up pretty good on ya varnish is a little different with the bamboo rods. So we rotate them a little bit longer. But I think you know, the coating stuff, like Matt said, it's kind of got to be in the right mood. And you know, if you're not in a good mood, or you're hurrying, or rushing, inevitably you'll touch a wet part or banging a wall or something happens and you're better off to just take a break. And I think a lot of it's just about detail, you know, the magnification and the sanding. And I think the key prior to getting good finishes is the sanding, probably more than the coating. You know, it's how you clean up things and move on to the next step is quite most important. And then you get really, really boxy to just knowing how it behaves and when it's ready and when it's not when it's done. And once you kind of get all those things down just by practicing and using it quite a bit.



Dave S 54:51

Gotcha. Okay, so, so other than wrapping now, I mean, you put the real seat on you get that all set up, you know anything else that you guys you know, do differently That, you know, through the process, I guess you have a hook keeper up there too, as well, we offer a



Matt 55:05

hook keeper we find I think is people have gravitated the longer leaders that a lot of our customers actually don't prefer them because you end up finding the the leader, and the tip top. So most of our customer customers actually opt out of those. And then, you know, like, I think a lot of finish woodworking where it's easy to get 80% of the job done in all the devil is in the sanding and the finish work. And it's similar in rod building, there's a lot for us that, you know, it really is it the end steps of the process. We buff those, those all the coats on a buffing wheel, we're doing some really fine sanding, we're, you know, dressing up any kind of possible defects. So it comes back into why back to your earlier question about scaling up, I wouldn't know how to build 200 rods month, the way we do it, I just don't think it's possible, at least, at least not for me and not not, I don't want to work, you know, you know, around the clock seven days a week here to do that. So I just don't think it's possible. So, you know, I think it's really about how you fit and finish. And then, you know, good example, we had a rod built for a customer the other day. And it wasn't

structural, there was just a little air bubble in under the name badge. And we fought it and fought it and Joel's tried to send it back and get it done. The end of the day, we couldn't get the air bubble out. And we told the customer, you know, we're gonna build you an entirely new bucket. And we're gonna, we're gonna start over, we'll ship your rod to you. So you can go down to Argentina and fish it. But you'll have a new book coming in the mail. And that for us, you know, it's not cheap for us to do that. But it's important that that rod is as close to perfect as possible. And chances are he would have never seen that error. But not probably if I looked at most of my production rods that are down in my basement, they probably all have air bubbles somewhere, but it's just important to us that that we knew and we're not gonna we're not gonna send one out like that.



Dave S 57:06

Right? Right. What's the so on the on the reel seat? what's a typical type of wood? It sounds like you guys use some different types of what species is the most common? Yeah,



Joel 57:15

Tom was a wood collector. So yeah, one of the things he used to do in the mornings he chose computer in bed on blocks of wood blanks, is usually against guys who are golden pens or knives, because they're so tight blanks for for rod seats, but we work with probably about 20 different kinds of wood. We usually start off by saying you like light wood or dark wood, we have a lot of the traditional maples, like tiger stripes and bird's eye and, and, and box elder and things like that we do a lot of stuff with burrow woods, which tends to be more highly figured and has a lot of swirling kind of patterns to them. I think the most popular ones probably for us are, oh gosh, I am born as a pretty well known, you know, darker burlwood we have some kind of less common species like supel, which is an African artwood really beautiful Briar, we've got some really neat kind of spalted stuff. Now spalted means wood that has a fungus in it, which tends to make it have kind of gray streaks or black lines in it. So we've been doing some spalted, box elder and spalted Maple burrows that are really beautiful lately, but it just kind of depends, we usually give people a choice of eight real seats. If they express an interest, you know, if this our Box Elder will send him a box of receipts. If they say I want dark wood, we'll give them you know, eight different dark wood options. And then they actually pick the real seat that goes on their, on their rod. And so that's something we make in house too. So we buy the pearls and and section them and fortify them and then turn them on the way then and slot and mortise them for the real estate hardware. So that's something we did here. And I think it's kind of fun, because that's your interface with the rod. And so some of our customers get really into the idea of having a special hand on a special real seat and no special description. And that's kind of, you know, makes the rod really individual for them.



Matt 58:52

I think one thing that I do want to just circle back to because I find myself doing this at fly shows and stuff or when people come through for a tour of the shop, I spend, like ad nauseum. I'm so proud of the quality of our work and the fit and finish and you know, all of it. But I think one of the things that I come back to is we could do all that. And then if you went out strung up the rod and put a line on it, and it didn't cast great, you know, that doesn't matter. You know, it doesn't matter how much quality you put into the component parts if it's not a great rod, I think one of the things I want to come back to is just to talk about that design, you know, Tom's adherence to a rod that hadn't even ready to taper that loaded all the way to the handle. You know, we're seeing more and more whether it's Winston coming back to the pure Sage with the LL that did really well this year at the shows. You know, I think that people are realizing that rods, especially for fishing freshwater and trout rod specifically got too stiff and you lost that connection lost that field. And yeah, the show, you know, you can cast 80 or 90 feet and feel like a hero but that's it. You know, Tom's philosophy was that trout fishing is 45 feet away. And if the trout are farther away, then do a better job stocking and getting closer and, and then, you know, fish to them. But it's really, I think, important to protect tidbit with a soft tip. And to have a rod that is really accurate and has a really delicate presentation, especially as waters are getting more and more pressured and crowded and fish are getting more and more picky. You know, I find that I prefer a rod that is really delicate and precise over a cannon because I just like eye catch and land more fish that way.



Dave S 1:00:35

I agree. Yeah, I agree. I think I think that's exactly do you guys feel with your rods? Do you feel a flex in the actual handle?



Matt 1:00:43

Yeah, I mean, I can tell you the difference on our rods, if we build a handle that has 12 cork, or 13 cork making it either a six or six and a half inch handle that extra cork is actually changing the point at which the rod is flexing. And I can feel it be a hair stiffer, with a little bit longer handle. And so they're definitely bending all the way down to the handle.



Joel 1:01:07

Yeah, we talked about having kind of an action that has kind of a lively, mid or lively but

so you feel them instead of them having the absence of feel if that makes sense.



Dave S 1:01:16

Yep, that does that. No, I think you're right. Matt, you the point you made, I remember that as things were, it seemed like it was all about, you know, the rod companies were coming out more and more, you know, faster, faster, faster. And then it seemed like everybody stopped here in the last five or 10 years. Just kind of thought like, wow, what do we have now we've got this super stiff, super fast rod and like, and I kind of like a soft rod. And I think people are starting I think you're totally right on that.



Matt 1:01:40

I think one thing too that Joel I both really believe in and Tom believed in is, you know, rolling over different lines, you know, coming up with different models of rods just to stimulate customers, it it doesn't feel good, you know, have people own a rod for two years, and then be told that that rod doesn't work anymore, and they got to buy the newer one. And, you know, his philosophy was build it once and build it really well. And make it something you can hand off to your kids not something that you fish for a season or two and then replace, you know, an environmental piece around the waist of going through that there's for me, you know, to buy a seven or \$800 rod and then two years later, sell it quickly on Craigslist, so I can buy another seven or \$800 rod it doesn't feel right. So, you know, we have customers will come back six or eight years later and say I have one of your nine foot five weights. You know, did you guys come out with something new? Should I buy something new? And we say no, we're still building the same nine foot five weight love it. You know, maybe you'd like it for weight or you know something different. But we're not gonna try to resell you a five way just because we're going to try to make another sale



Dave S 1:01:47

because it's the newer and I think that is the Patagonia I think you guys have noted before. That's the the mentality of Patagonia and and what they do, you know, they try to you know, even they have repair days, I think I just saw you know, they have days where you take your stuff and they'll repair it for free. You know, instead of buying and creating more stuff and I you know, I have a personal note, you know, I've talked a little bit about this but I grew up kind of around a fly shop and it was we had a small fly shop it was tiny and you know, we didn't do a lot of sales but I remember the pressure was always man you got to get get the rods out the door because there's a new one coming in next year

and in since we didn't sell a lot It was always a pressure I think we missed our mark we should have connected with with you guys that have made it easier.



Matt 1:03:33

You know, I think some companies to want you to own to wade through 12 weight of their right. And I think back to that your questions originally about steelhead, you know our philosophy is we're going to try to be every rod for you. But take that one time, you know for single hand trout fishing, where you'd like to throw dry flies or you want that presentation and pick that one rod and have that be your special rod on those days. And then there is a time and a place you know when it's blowing 25 miles an hour on the Yellowstone that you want, you know a really powerful five way and you might not fish our rod that day. So we're not trying to take over your whole quiver just be the one really special one in there are two That's right.



Dave S 1:04:16

Go well what are you guys, we're about to get a wrap this thing up here before before we jump into a quick little rapid fire round. Do you have any? Any other notes we missed here? Anything you want to cover as far as action or any anything there?



Joel 1:04:28

No, I think this was great. Yeah. It'd be covered. We had to say our perfect.



Dave S 1:04:36

No, I know. Now there's no way to cover the hour so well. So I guess we'll start off with that space. So you know you guys it sounds like you haven't yet built a rod of No. Have you guys build a rod on your own? Or is it you still use the Hall of Tom's old stuff and Do you have plans to eventually build something that's more of your what you used to create?



Matt 1:04:54

I think for sure that there's two rods both both the seven weight and our eight foot four weight. We're designs that Tom worked on until he passed away. But that never got rolled into prototypes. So those are two rods that I were I feel proud that Joel and I have been able to put our stamp on the final product because we launched off of Tom's plans, but still had to go through different iterations in the prototyping and come up with a final

rods. So I think we're really proud to develop those. And while we're not going to redevelop, you know, an existing model of Tom's, I do think that we've played around with the idea I have a customer that is really interested in us building a bamboo trap, spay rod, and I've been kind of noodling in my head about what that might look like. And so I think some new designs for us are definitely on the horizon, but I don't think they're going to be at the expense of the the tried and true rods that we have.



Dave S 1:05:46

Gotcha. Okay. So there's no Yeah, like you said, there's no there's no plan for a trout spay rod a time in the in the near future for you.



Matt 1:05:53

We'll see maybe out of bamboo.



1:05:55

what's what's, what's intervene. Yeah.



Dave S 1:05:57

Yeah, that's right. Well, yeah, that's lots of good questions on the bamboo. So you know, it's a take



Joel 1:06:04

up space and intriguing space for us. Because it kind of fits. We see it more and more Montana. It fits with kind of our goals of, you know, really making rods for trout fishing. So yeah, it's really interesting to us. Yeah, it is.



Dave S 1:06:17

Yeah, I think it's pretty cool. So back on that bamboo. So yeah, let's start with you, Joel. You know, graphite bamboo, you know, or, or fiberglass. What's, what's your go to what what do you like?



Joel 1:06:27

Well, it's a tough question. I think it was really, really important to Tom to make all three, you know, even as a small maker, because I think we feel like they all have different places. Depending how we're fishing and when we're fishing, I would say I think there's really nothing like fishing bamboo. Because for me when I fish a bamboo rod, I always say I've got a little more swag that day like I get ready I already get ready pretty slow as Matt will attest, but I get ready a little slower. I kind of feel like you know, it's a little special when I'm fishing you know, it's certainly a purpose driven rod so like Matt said we're not going to fish on when it's honking 20 on the Yellowstone we're in a boat you know, we're in our Spring Creek and and it's calm and you can see who is coming off the water I don't think there's much that compares to casting and catching fish on bamboo especially lighter line weights.



Dave S 1:07:14

That seems like the bamboo one of the cool things about bamboo is it is that slower that nice you know kind of in but your rods alright your graphite can already go that route is there a big difference between your graphite and your



Joel 1:07:26

significant difference I think that in the in the world of graphite our rods are slower than most and because of that progressive action and so I think in that world they're very different but i think you know bamboo has more of an organic feel to it and I think it's hard not to fit it's hard to fish bamboo and not feel kind of a connection to the history of fly fishing. You know, we'll throw up reading about chalk streams in England and you know, all this kind of history to it. You know that being said, say my second favorite rod is probably a graphite rod. Because our raft rods have such a great feel or two piece graphite rods I just love fishing, and they make me feel like I'm pretty much got a Swiss Army Knife because I can I can nim target nymph to fish, I can dry fish, I can fish on the border with them, you know, I can kind of do everything and I just have the age where I just am not good at carrying multiple rods. So I just want to have one thing that I can kind of make work pretty well for everything. And so if that's the case, Aryan f6 is probably my second favorite ride and graphite.



Dave S 1:08:22

Okay, okay, cool. And, and Matt, I'll ask you, what's your on a different subject? What's your the music question here for you? Do you have a favorite type of music band?

Anything you like to listen,



**Matt** 1:08:33

I think if you were to walk through the shop on any given day, it's really up in the air. Pandora, you know, heavy metal to the Grateful Dead. Radiohead to the Lumineers. I mean, it's really kind of not the most musical person but I like having some stuff out in the shop while we're working. We also though, are admittedly huge podcast geeks. We lose a ton of podcast while we're working on the rods.



**Joel** 1:09:00

Yeah, making all the podcasts for sure.



**Dave S** 1:09:03

There you go. So what's your so that your non flyfishing podcast you have anything you listen to? That's a favorite? That's not a you know, it's not an official



**Matt** 1:09:12

little plug cuz he's a good friend, but Ed Robertson's mountain prairie podcast. You know, he interviews people who in his mind are shaping the modern West. And it's everything from conservation to entrepreneurship and everything in between. But yeah, that's been a really cool podcast to listen to.



**Dave S** 1:09:31

Cool, and enjoy. I was gonna ask you about that too. But one thing that's kind of interesting, you know, because we've never met in person. I actually haven't even seen a photo of you. I was curious. Do you know all of her white? Have you ever? You ever heard him much?



**Joel** 1:09:42

Yeah, yeah, we know him a little bit. Surely I've seen him and read articles and things like that. I'm not sure my beard compares.



Dave S 1:09:49

Well, I can tell I can tell you this. You sound exactly like Oh, really? Yeah, well, at least that's the way they get might be just the audio here but every time would you talk I'm like does that always Is that?



Joel 1:10:01

Yeah, I guess it was lifestyle. I wish I was in office.



Dave S 1:10:05

That's right. I know he's got Well, yeah. Well, he's going through, I think he's got a rough period with this one.



Joel 1:10:10

I think I actually started corresponding him before we bought before we bought this company about some fishing chalk, which is a straw, right? Yeah. Yeah. Some articles on it. But yeah, it might be a little bit cold, too. So I'm probably raspier than usual.



Dave S 1:10:24

Oh, that's probably what it is. That's why I was cool. And is there anything you know, as far as I mean, obviously, you guys have the class, which is cool. Any other books or resources that might be good for rod building specifically? I mean, I obviously you guys learn from the best. So maybe that's a tough question. But anything out there



Joel 1:10:38

that's better about this than me. But I just, I think about learning in general. And Internet's such a great resource for it. I mean, I think if you have questions, and you go to YouTube, or just go to Google, and you look up, you can find different philosophies on wrapping rods, I mean, we all the time. And like I said, math is better at it than I am. just explore, you know, try to figure out different ways that people are doing things or different materials they're using or different solutions. And it's really, it's kind of boundless, it seems like it's really up to you if you want to, you know, be self taught and look at it. And we're lucky, like I said, that video examples of all these different techniques



Matt 1:11:11

that I've also found, I'm such a visual learner that obviously YouTube is great to watch something, but to me, the rod building community is really gracious, and I haven't found any space for ego in it. So I guess, you know, we started a group called the Bozeman Rob builders Guild, which once a month in the wintertime, and just, you know, having adult beverage and show off some of the rods we've been building. And I'd say, similarly, if you're into building, you know, looking at something like the classic firearm form, or the firearms form, but find a local builder, and just don't be bashful, you know, give me y'all taking that come see what you're doing in your shop, and I've yet to meet someone who wouldn't give you that time to, to, you know, improve your rapping or your coding technique and things like that.



Dave S 1:12:01

That's cool. That's a great tip. Yeah, you probably don't realize that there's probably a local builder in probably most most states or most cities, right? Oh,



Matt 1:12:09

yeah. Yeah, for sure.



Dave S 1:12:11

Cool. All right. You guys. I think we're about there any, you know, in the next six months or so, anything new coming? You want to note either with you guys or the company?



Matt 1:12:19

No, no, a lot. You know, I think one of the things is Bozeman is obviously a destination. And I think there's this perception that you know, as a flagship, you know, as a rod building shop that we're really kind of hands off, but we really have open door policy. come for a visit if you're if you're in Montana. More right off the highway here in Bozeman and we'll walk you through the shop show you everything we've been talking about go out cast some rods in the front lawn, and we welcome visitors. So we'd love to see anybody who's in the area got up.



Joel 1:12:53

We'll be we'll be at some of the flora or fly fishing shows this spring so there'll be in Denver

and New Jersey and Marlborough mass and Lauren, Pleasanton, California so if you're in one of those locations and listening combines Yes.



Dave S 1:13:06

Okay, great great so and they can find you also online at either I guess Tom Morgan rod Smith comm or as the trout what what's your other site that retail



Joel 1:13:13  
rods?



Dave S 1:13:15  
Yeah, just try



Joel 1:13:16  
are just pushing Tom. We're gonna Google you'll find that.



Dave S 1:13:19

That's right. That's right. Okay, guys. Well, hey, thanks for coming on and sharing all the information. I mean, you know, the Tom Morgan story we just touched on I think Jerry is probably I would love to hear more about you know, her story too and that so maybe, maybe down the line we can keep in touch with you and get some more information there. And But yeah, I appreciate you guys coming on and chatting about. Great Thanks, Dave. Thanks. So there you go. If you want to find all the show notes with all the links we covered just go to wet fly swing comm slash 161. Please share a link to this episode on your favorite social channel. We have grown the show 100% organically over the years and it is that one share at a time that has allowed us to create this amazing, amazing resource and super awesome podcast so appreciate you sharing that. Just want to thank you again today for stopping by check out the show. Looking forward to catching up with you soon. Hope to maybe see you on the river or online. Thanks for listening to the wet fly swing fly fishing show. For notes and links from this episode, visit wet fly



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